Ebooks & Print:
Features, Functions & Preferences

Results from a 2016 ProQuest Global
Student & Researcher Ebook Survey

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"I can take an ebook anywhere as they aren't heavy or burdensome to carry,"

a student told ProQuest as part of a recent survey. The way physical distinctions between print and ebooks feed into a preference is easy to hypothesize, but it's telling that the student doesn't stop at those attributes: **"Corrections are easier to make in ebooks and it's faster to find what I want in the text."**

ProQuest conducted this survey to gain — and offer — better insights into student awareness, usage, and perceptions of ebooks. This paper presents survey data to explore:
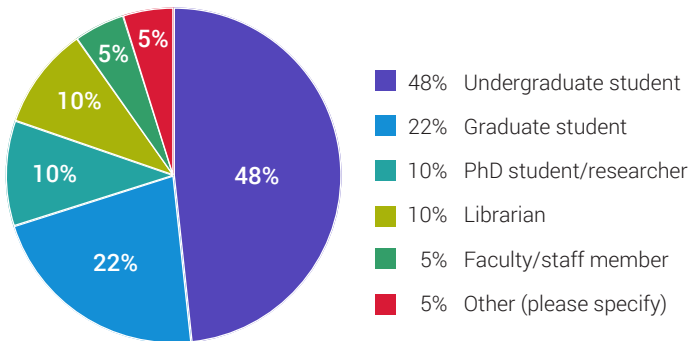
- The importance of and preferences for e- and print resources
- How students and researchers are finding, retrieving, and reading ebooks
- The features and functions of ebooks
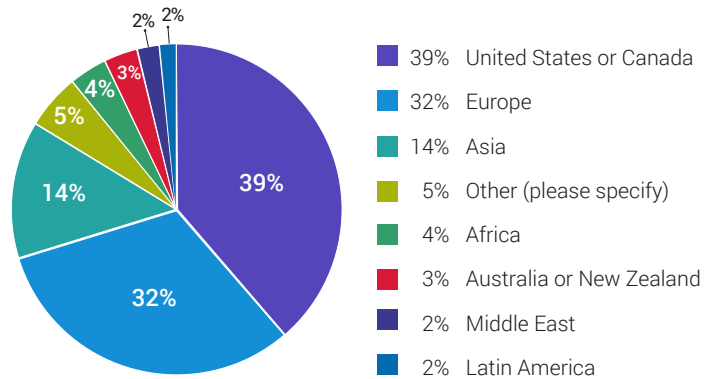
Of the 2,181 survey respondents:

- 48% are undergraduate students;
- 22% are graduate students;
- 10% are PhD students or researchers;
- 10% are librarians; and
- 5% are faculty or staff members.

While most participants live or study in the United States (39%) or Europe (32%), students and researchers from across the globe participated. Researchers represented several fields of study, including Science, Technology, and Engineering (27%); Business and Economics (15%); Health and Medicine (13%); and Education (9%).
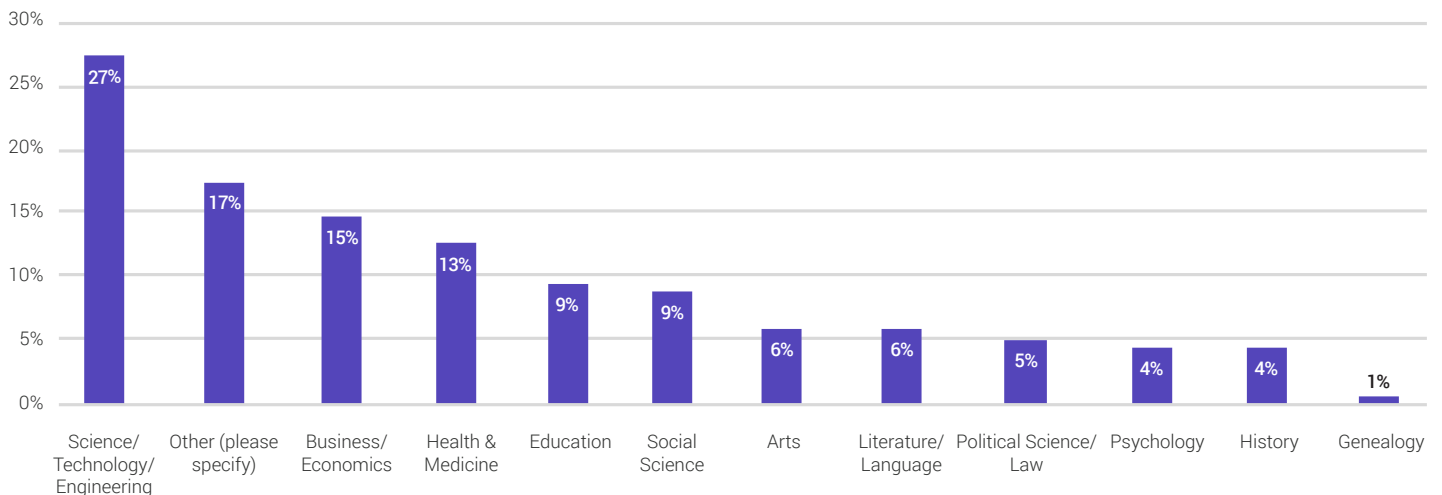
Which of the following best describes you?

48%	Undergraduate student
22%	Graduate student
10%	PhD student/researcher
10%	Librarian
5%	Faculty/staff member
5%	Other (please specify)

Please indicate your geographic location.

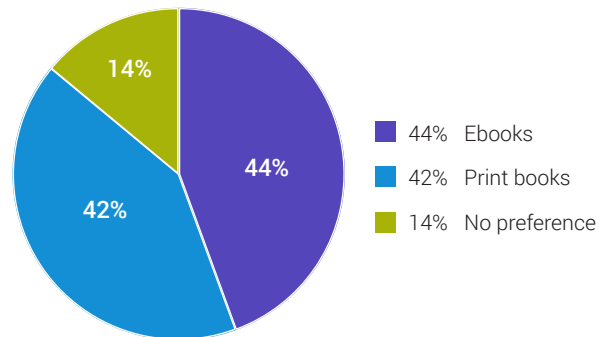|	
39%	United States or Canada
32%	Europe
14%	Asia
5%	Other (please specify)
4%	Africa
3%	Australia or New Zealand
2%	Middle East
2%	Latin America

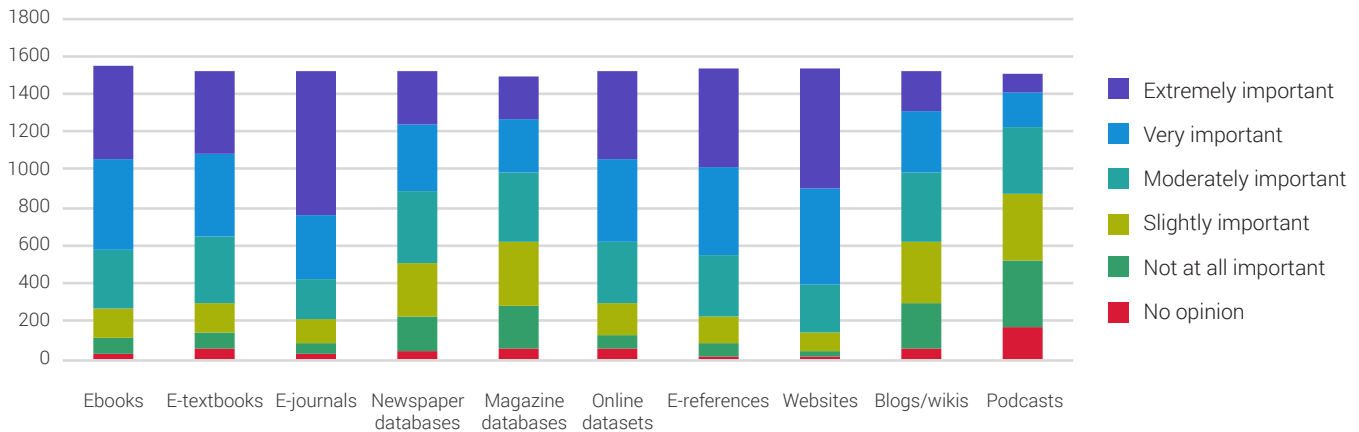## Please indicate your primary subject/major of study.

The Importance of and Preference for Electronic and Print Resources

Respondents find both print and electronic resources integral to their research or completion of assignments, but the format of the resource — textbook, journal, or otherwise — affects preference. 73% call websites extremely or very important to their work, with print references and journals ranked as less important than their electronic counterparts. Slightly more respondents prefer ebooks (44%) over print books (42%). Textbooks do not follow this digital-over-print trend: 70% describe print textbooks as extremely or very important, whereas only 56% give e-textbooks that same importance.
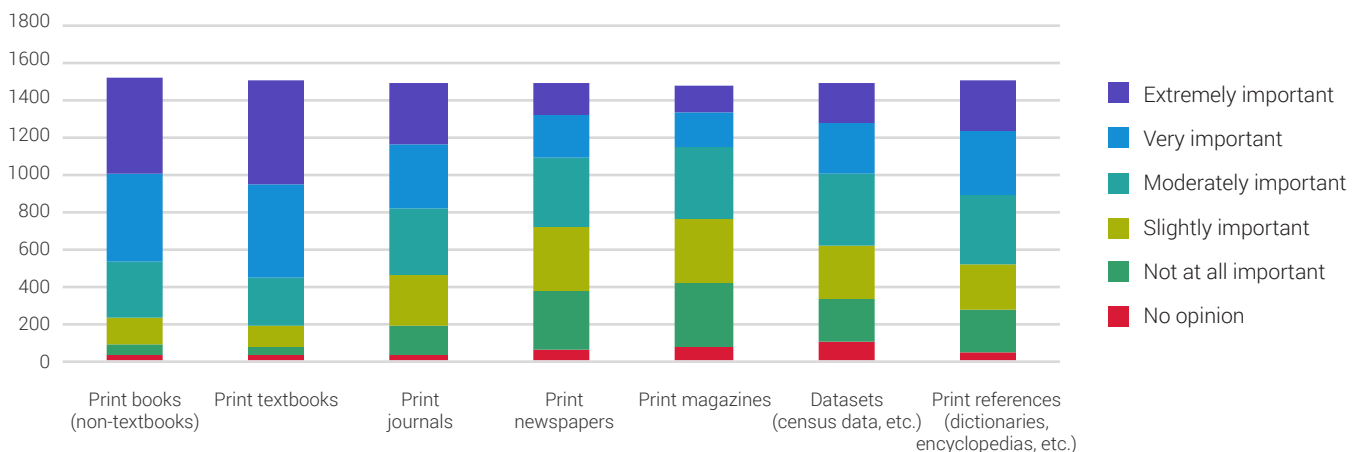
Do you prefer to use ebooks or print books for research/class assignments? Select one answer.

- 44% Ebooks
- 42% Print books
- 14% No preference

How important are the following electronic resources when completing research/class assignments?

Legend:
- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important
- No opinion

Categories: Ebooks, E-textbooks, E-journals, Newspaper databases, Magazine databases, Online datasets, E-references, Websites, Blogs/wikis, Podcasts

How important are the following print resources when completing research/class assignments?

Legend:
- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important
- No opinion

Categories: Print books (non-textbooks), Print textbooks, Print journals, Print newspapers, Print magazines, Datasets (census data, etc.), Print references (dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.)

Preference and relative importance can be driven by a number of factors. Generally, respondents care about getting their information in the timeliest and most convenient way. *"The form is not important. Availability is important,"* shares one respondent.
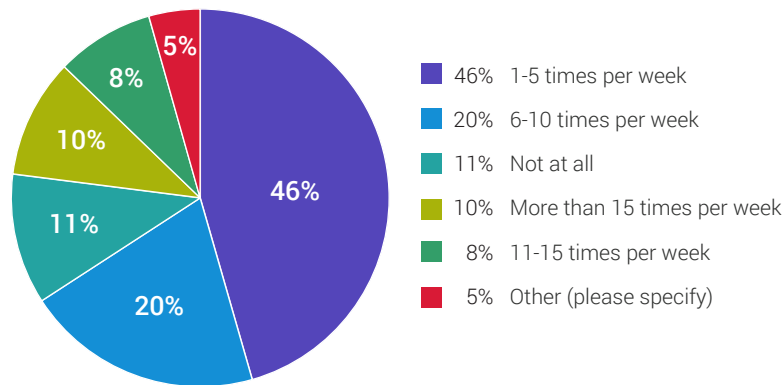
Yet what is convenient or timely to one is not necessarily convenient or timely for everyone:

- Many of those surveyed laud the features available only in ebook format – their portability and on-demand access; as well as embedded note-taking, citation, and highlighting features. Researchers can use tools within ebooks to, as one respondent describes, *"quickly and efficiently locate the sections [needed]."* Another shares, *"I enjoy using Ebooks because they [are] easy to access no matter where I am."*

- But not everyone has access to the same hardware, software and devices. *"Occasionally the big file sizes slow down my computer, making it hard to read the textbook online,"* notes one. Another reported lacking a portable device on which to read ebooks, while others lack reliable access to WiFi or even electricity.
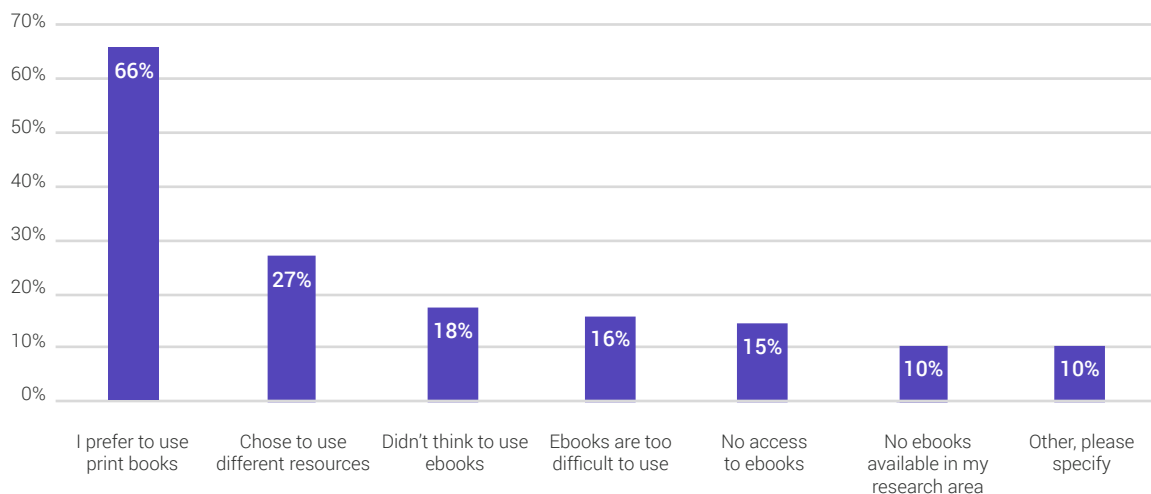
The type of research can also affect preference and relative importance of print books and ebooks. One respondent does have "a preference [for ebooks or print books], but I prefer each format for different uses." Says another: *"The kind of information I'm looking for determines whether an ebook or print book is better."* And yet another: *"It really depends on what the research is regarding."*

Regardless of preference or relative importance, nearly all respondents use ebooks for their research and class assignments. 85% use ebooks at least once a week, and nearly 40% use them six or more times a week. Over 62% of respondents have instructors who assigned or recommended ebooks. As one respondent put it, *"Either/or thinking on the subject [of ebooks and print books] is not useful."* Only 11% said they did not use ebooks at all to complete their work; the vast majority of those not using ebooks choose not to, due to a preference for print books.

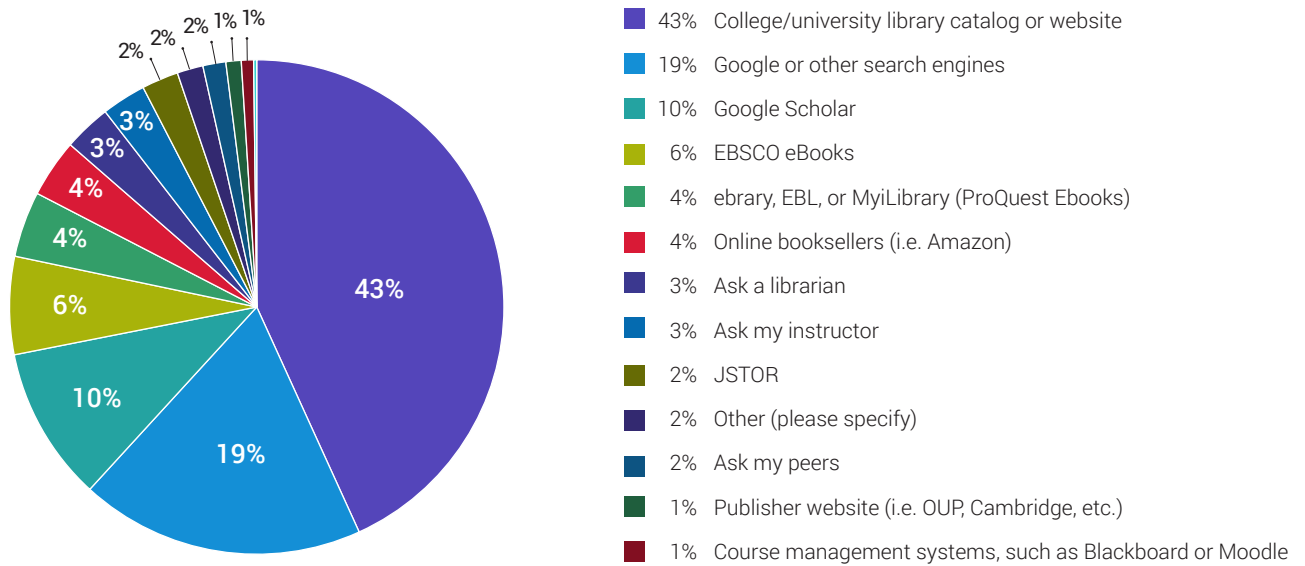### Approximately how many times per week do you use ebooks for research/class assignments?

46%	1-5 times per week
20%	6-10 times per week
11%	Not at all
10%	More than 15 times per week
8%	11-15 times per week
5%	Other (please specify)

If none, what prevents you from using ebooks? Select all that apply.

Category	Percentage
I prefer to use print books	66%
Chose to use different resources	27%
Didn't think to use ebooks	18%
Ebooks are too difficult to use	16%
No access to ebooks	15%
No ebooks available in my research area	10%
Other, please specify	10%

How Students Find, Retrieve, and Read Ebooks
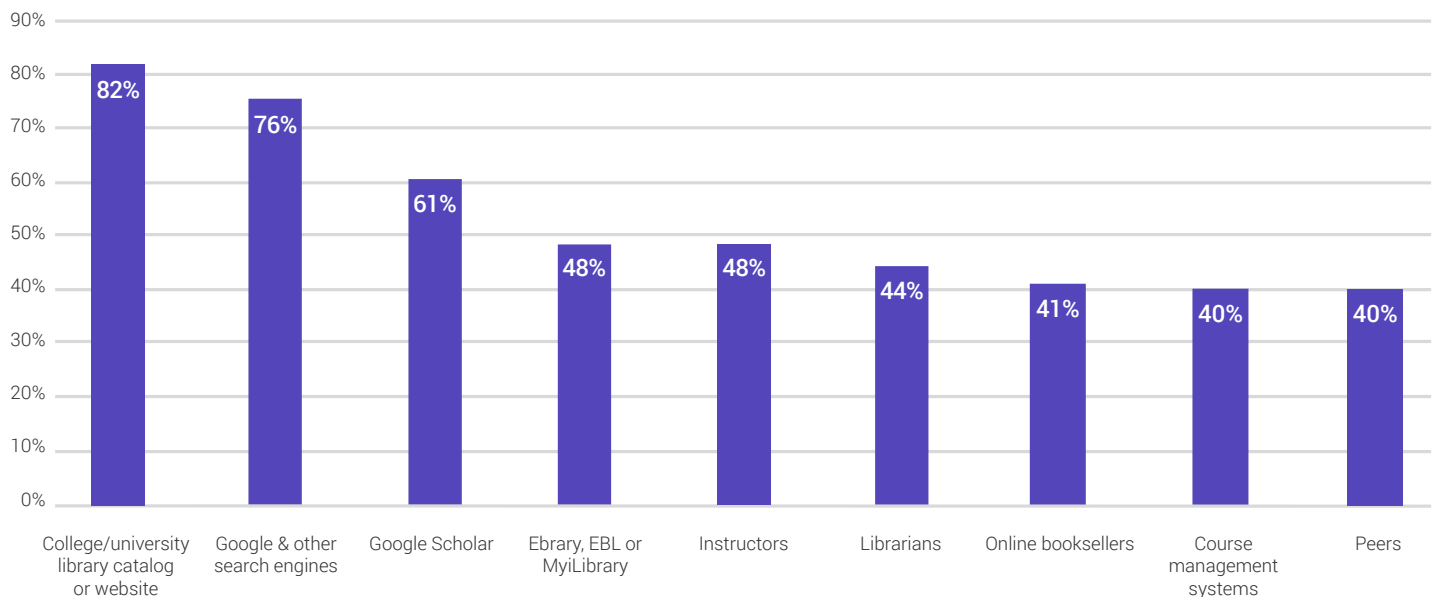
What is your most frequent starting point for finding ebooks for research/class assignments? Select one answer.

- 43% College/university library catalog or website
- 19% Google or other search engines
- 10% Google Scholar
- 6% EBSCO eBooks
- 4% ebrary, EBL, or MyiLibrary (ProQuest Ebooks)
- 4% Online booksellers (i.e. Amazon)
- 3% Ask a librarian
- 3% Ask my instructor
- 2% JSTOR
- 2% Other (please specify)
- 2% Ask my peers
- 1% Publisher website (i.e. OUP, Cambridge, etc.)
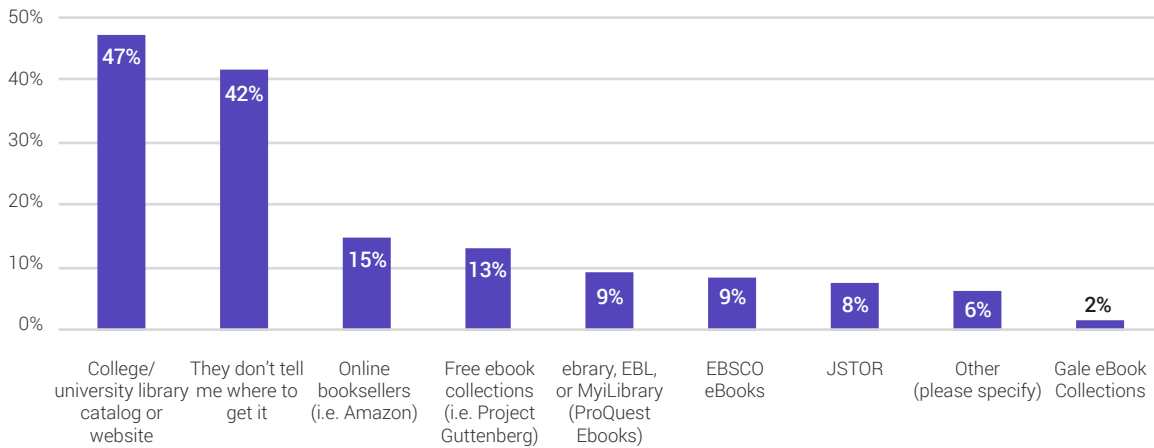- 1% Course management systems, such as Blackboard or Moodle

When asked about their most frequent starting point for finding ebooks for research or class assignments, 43% of respondents begin with their college or university library catalog or website, with an additional 19% starting with Google or other search engines, and 10% beginning with Google Scholar.

Despite stated search preferences, large percentages of respondents found a wide array of resources to be extremely or very important for finding books. The college or university library catalog or website still tops the list, with 82% calling it extremely or very important for finding ebooks. But many respondents also highlight additional extremely or very important resources.

How important are the following sites/methods for finding ebooks for research/class assignments?
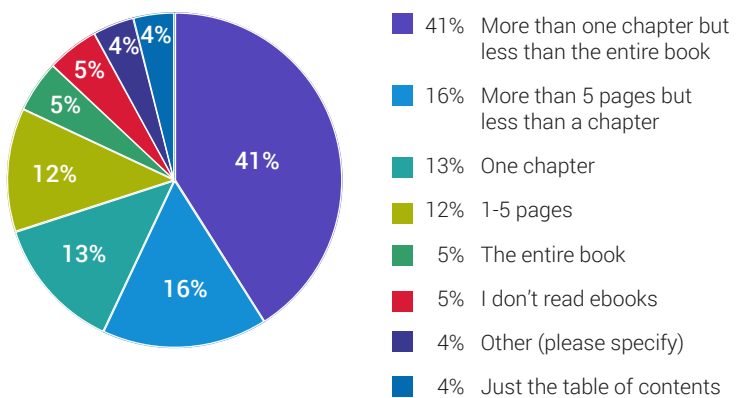
When your instructors recommend or assign an ebook, where do they suggest you go to get it? Select all that apply.
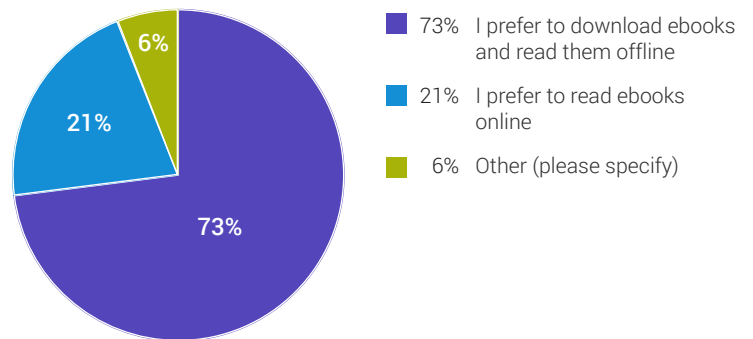

Among students whose instructors recommend or assign ebooks, most indicate that their instructor either suggested finding it on the college or university library catalog or website (47%), or offer no suggestion regarding where to find the ebook (42%).

When using ebooks to do research or complete class assignments, respondents want to focus on the relevant information. A full 90% who use ebooks read less than the entire book; 41% read more than one chapter but less than the entire book, and 32% read one chapter or less. The majority of respondents (73%) prefer to download ebooks and read them offline, rather than online. And, despite the common frustration with eye strain, a relatively small percentage (21%) read printed versions of ebooks. In fact, when reading ebooks for longer than 20 minutes, most respondents prefer reading the ebook on their laptop (52%) or tablet (31%), reinforcing the value of ebooks' portability.
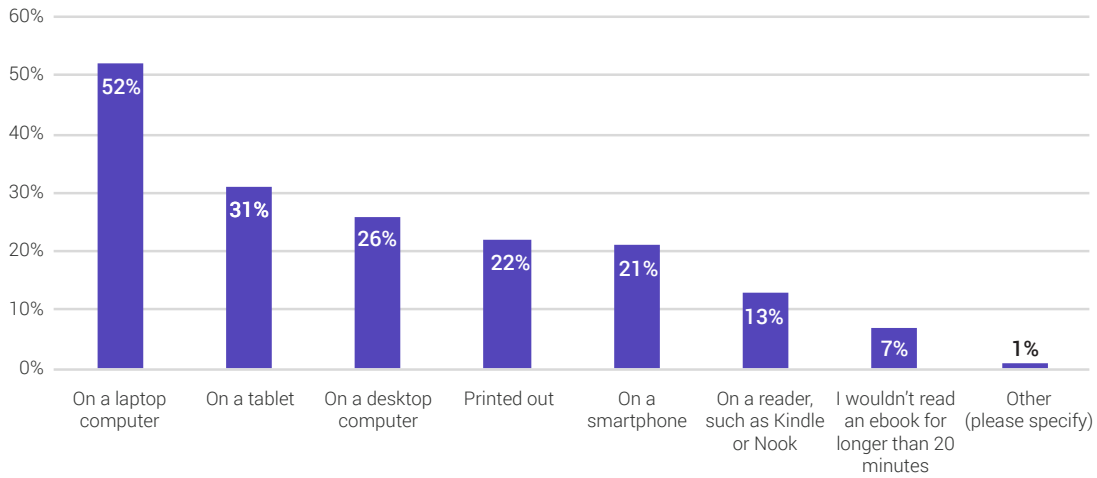
How much of an ebook do you typically read when doing research or completing class assignments?

- 41% More than one chapter but less than the entire book
- 16% More than 5 pages but less than a chapter
- 13% One chapter
- 12% 1-5 pages
- 5% The entire book
- 5% I don't read ebooks
- 4% Other (please specify)
- 4% Just the table of contents

Do you prefer to read ebooks online or offline?

- 73% I prefer to download ebooks and read them offline
- 21% I prefer to read ebooks online
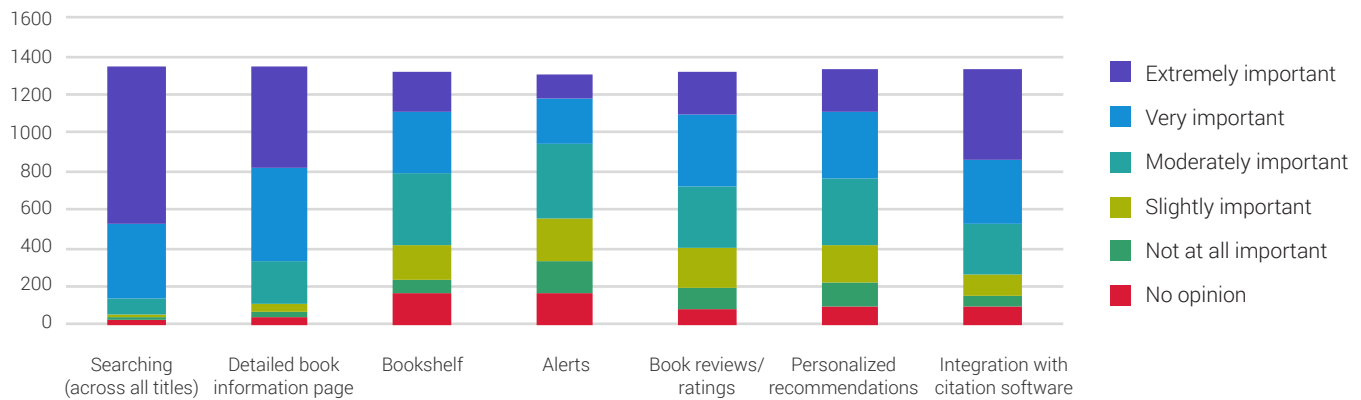- 6% Other (please specify)

When you have to read an ebook for a longer period of time (i.e. more than 20 minutes) how do you usually read it?
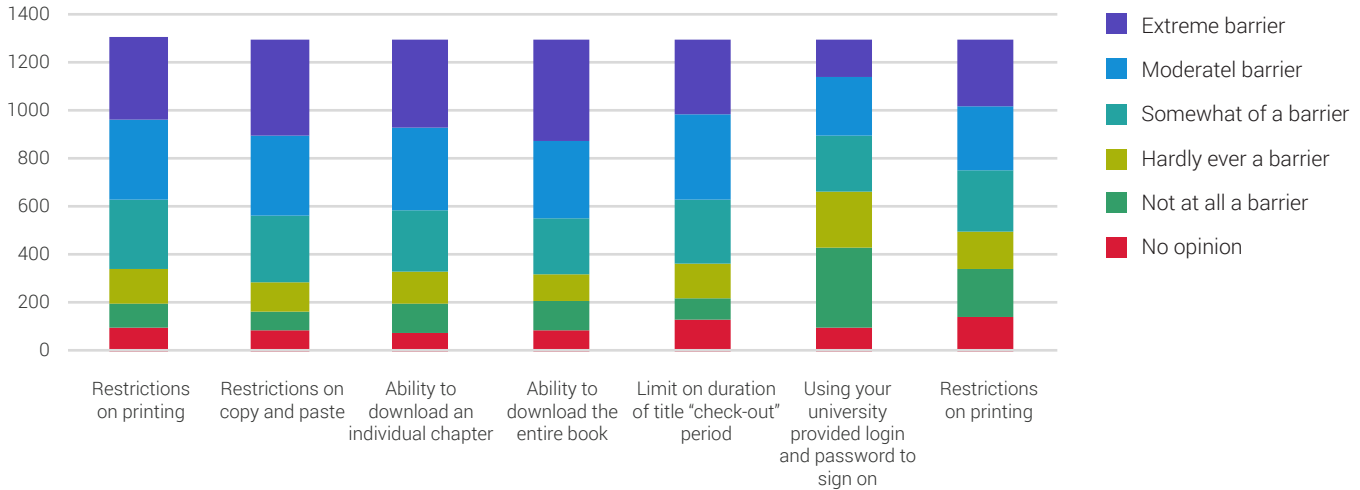

Ebook Features and Functions

Students and researchers appreciate functions that help them quickly locate and evaluate ebooks. Among "extremely or very important" designations, almost 90% of respondents name searching across all titles; 75% name book information pages, and 60% cite integration with citation software.

When considering overall functionality, how important are the following ebook features?
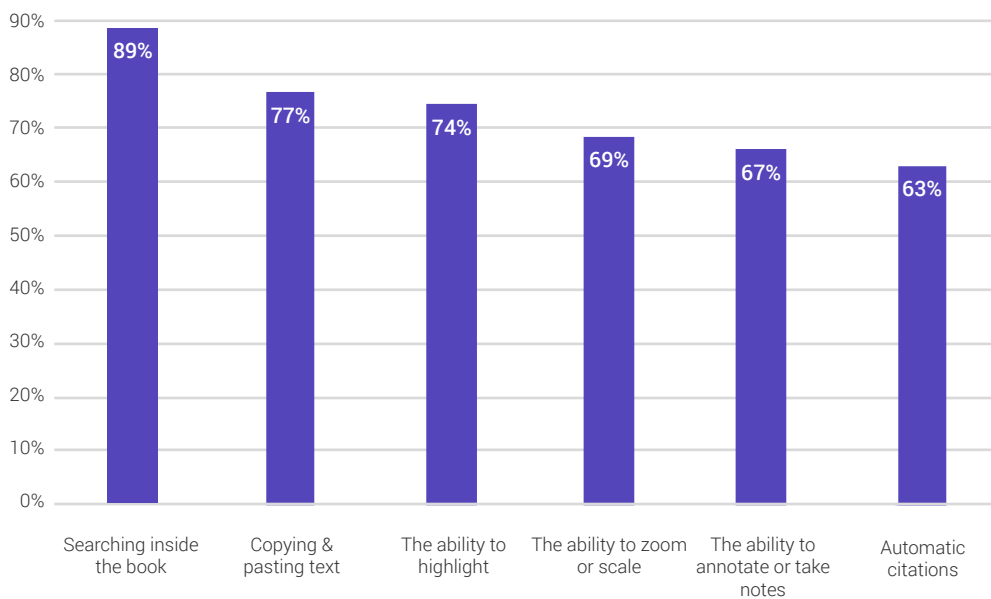
When it comes to accessing ebooks, respondents prefer using university-provided credentials rather than separate username and passwords provided by the ebook provider. While 22% find a separate login and password to be an extreme barrier, 26% see a single sign-on as "not at all a barrier."

To what extent, if at all, is each of the following a barrier when using ebooks from your library?

Legend:
- Extreme barrier
- Moderatel barrier
- Somewhat of a barrier
- Hardly ever a barrier
- Not at all a barrier
- No opinion

X-axis categories: Restrictions on printing, Restrictions on copy and paste, Ability to download an individual chapter, Ability to download the entire book, Limit on duration of title "check-out" period, Using your university provided login and password to sign on, Restrictions on printing

Respondents also emphasize the importance quickly and easily locating, evaluating and retrieving information within ebooks. The features respondents most commonly note as reasons they like ebooks — searchability, portability, accessibility, and instant availability — all highlight the ease with which users can access ebooks and find the information they seek. *"It's fast and easy to search for particular sentences," notes one respondent. Another likes ebooks because they are "easily accessible [and] readable, without the need to visit the library," while another points out that it's "easier to verify citations [with ebooks]."*

More than 60% of respondents name the following features as extremely or very important to ebooks:

Feature	Percentage
Searching inside the book	89%
Copying & pasting text	77%
The ability to highlight	74%
The ability to zoom or scale	69%
The ability to annotate or take notes	67%
Automatic citations	63%

Less emphasized were collaborative tools; nearly a quarter of respondents found the ability to share notes or to share via email to be only slightly or not at all important.

Despite recognizing the benefits of ebooks and stating their willingness to use them in research, respondents also note barriers to using library ebooks. Not being able to download an entire book (33%) and restrictions on copying and pasting (31%) are the most commonly noted extreme barriers that keep respondents from using ebooks from the library.
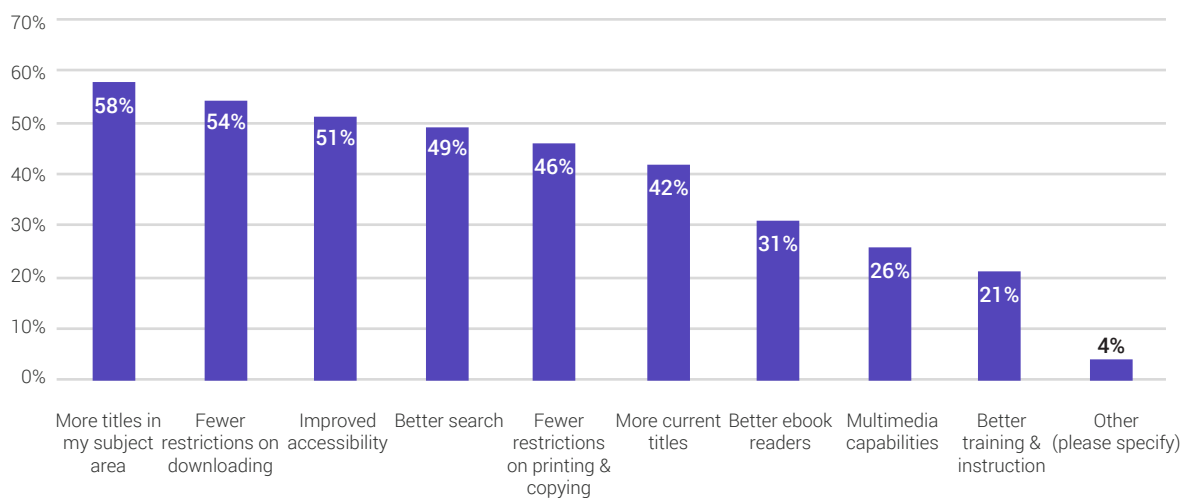
In fact, while many respondents appreciate ebooks for their perceived ease of use and convenience, the main reasons respondents report frustration is a perceived lack of convenience. Some find ebooks to be more time-consuming than print, most often because ebook functionality varies from provider to provider.

- Not all ebooks have the attributes that respondents found helpful, such as copy and paste, easy in-text search, and automatic citations.
- Not all respondents have the devices to make using ebooks feel simple and useful; others are frustrated with software requirements, inconsistencies across platforms, or poor web design and user navigation within platforms.

"I don't like having to view eBooks in the library's in-browser reader…; I also don't like that I can only download a certain number of pages," shares one participant. Some complain of eye strain or the inability to flip back and forth quickly between sections; one respondent is frustrated because, with ebooks, they *"can't do a side-by-side comparison simultaneously."*

Still others are frustrated because not all titles are published as ebooks. In fact, nearly 60% of respondents feel that publishing more titles as ebooks in their area of study would improve the suitability of ebooks for their research and class assignments. Other solutions for improving suitability included decreasing restrictions on downloading (54%), improving accessibility (51%), improving search functionality (51%), decreasing restrictions on printing and copying (46%), and including more current titles (42%).

What do you feel would make ebooks more suitable for use in your area of study? (Select all that apply.)

Turn to ProQuest for Ebooks and Print Books

While ebooks offer many benefits, a lack of standardization across providers makes it difficult for students to confidently state an overall preference for ebooks over print. ProQuest's global student survey makes it clear that both formats are seen as valuable. Libraries that want to offer print, e or a combination can rely on ProQuest for innovative solutions across both formats.

ProQuest offers nearly 1 million ebook titles from over 750 publishers, enabling libraries to curate rich collections tailored to their users' needs. Access is simplified through ProQuest Ebook Central, which offers a modern, user-centered design that supports:

- **Discovery:** With simple and advanced search and relevancy-ranked book and chapter results and the ability to narrow down results through filters, Ebook Central makes it easy for researchers to skim results and decide which titles they'd like to explore further. Ebook Central also integrates with multiple discovery layers to help users find titles.

- **Evaluation:** Before committing to a book, researchers can use the detailed book landing page to evaluate the title. The detailed description, bibliographic information, and table of contents foster more efficient workflow and help readers decide whether to read the book now, save the title to their bookshelf to read later, or look for a different book that is a better match for their needs.

- **Access:** Ebook Central connects users to content and helps keep them in context while reading, reducing disruptions to their workflow. Online and offline options include DRM-free chapter downloads and full-book downloads and pair with heavily used features optimized for tablets/smartphones and time-saving tools for note taking, citation creating, and collaboration all from within the book.

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